/37 cont./

83. Since, as it appears, the person who asked me this question is one of those who believes in the heavenly paradise which the Indians live in, invented and perpetuated by arm-chair writers, who "have written pretty books to prove to us that the savage is natural man and that we could wish nothing more than to become more like him" (J. de Maistre), I shall not answer him with the well-worn "there is nothing to what has been said," but I shall /38/ say to him, without going into detail, that there is considerable exaggeration in the reports and information given by writers, avid for publicity at any cost, in almost everything that has been said about the robustness, longevity, corpulence, and healthiness of the Indians.

Eyewitnesses will be in agreement with me, and taught by painful experience and vigilance will not to let themselves be surprised by so many dithyrambs, such as are heard about native races, particularly if they have already disappeared. From long distances, long falsehoods.

773 826 84. These Indians, like most peoples of the earth, live looking up to past times, in which (they say), men were strong, corpulent, and even giants. They add, these Indians, for this purpose, the fact that their ancestors were of such extraordinary height that they made inscriptions on the high rocks and plucked fruit with their hands, which today must be picked with the use of ladders and hooks. They further say that their race, principally due to premature matrimonies, is now degenerating in such a way that its descendants will have to use ladders and hooks, or forks, to pick ají, which are but one meter high. This universal tendency, common to individuals and to peoples, has already been observed and satirized by Horace in his famous sentence: "In my opinion, any past time was better," which is attributed to old people.

141 ● 165 This is pure legend; and what is certain is that the Indians are, indeed, not of tall stature nor do they attain any singular longevity.

Vital Statistics

I was able to obtain reasonably reliable information on the families of 19 women. They had had 79 children, an average of about 4 per woman, and of these 46 were living and 33 dead. Most of these women were still bearing children, so that the average number of children per woman must be higher. Only 3 women for whom reliable information was available could be considered as definitely past child-bearing — a significant fact in itself as showing how few women survive this period. These 3 had had 21 children, or an average of 7 apiece, which is probably somewhat above the tribal average as these women lived longer than most do. The average number of children per woman who reaches maturity may be estimated at about 5, or possibly a little more.

Over 40% of the children born to women now living are already dead. Practically all of them died before reaching maturity. As many of the surviving children are still young infants, it is certain that many of them will die before they are mature. Of the 21 children born to the 3 women past child-bearing, 14 are dead, 67%. From these figures it is reasonable to estimate that 50% of the children born into this tribe die before reaching maturity.

Of the 46 living children involved in this tabulation, 25 are males and 21 females. Definite information as to sex could be obtained for only 20 of the 33 dead children and these included 9 males and 11 females. These figures do not demonstrate any probable departure from a sex ratio of approximately 1:1 or any correlation of infant mortality with sex.

In all 23 females were personally recorded in detail and about 25 more were observed or were recorded from information given by husbands or other close relatives. These include all ages from birth to senility and it is significant that only two women were observed who were definitely mature sexually and who had not had any children. One of these, although sexually mature, was very young and not considered marriageable. The other was having her first pregnancy. It can thus be concluded that essentially 100% of the females who reach maturity are fertile and do have children. There is, on the other hand, a considerable group of young men who are sexually mature and are as old as women who have children but who are not married and disclaim having any children, an inevitable result in a polygamous society and one of which the significance will be discussed later.

No Kamarakoto knows his own age or the ages of his children and it is impossible to estimate these more closely than within 10 to 20%. There are, however, extremely few members of the tribe who can be called old. Certainly not more than 15% of the mature women are past child-bearing, probably not over 10%, and it can be roughly estimated that probably not more than 20 people in the tribe are over 45 years of age. We encountered and heard of none whose age could reasonably be estimated at more than about 60. The tribe thus

165 has very high infant and child mortality and a short life span for those who survive this period. As a general impression which could not be checked by any actual figures, the mortality at intermediate ages, say between 15 and 35, is probably relatively low.

16 With a birth rate probably about 5 or somewhat more per mature woman and a pre-maturity mortality of about 50%, the tribe should be holding its own or increasing slowly. There are no independent data to show whether this is true, but there is some reason to believe that it is true in general, over long periods, but that the tribe has decreased within the past generation or so. The desertion of the desirable upper part of Kamarata has been mentioned and the whole region is thinly populated, even by Indian standards. Without any alteration in mode of life, it could surely support several times as many Indians as are living in it, probably at least ten times as many. Several older informants agreed that the population was much more dense when they were young. They explain this by the occurrence of epidemics, and there is no reason to doubt that this is the real cause. The present birth rate and mortality figures refer to an exceptionally favorable period. There have been periodic epidemics and crop failures that have abruptly lowered the population, which then builds up again slowly during periods like the present.[102] The Indians vigorously deny that there is any significant emigration, and there is no evidence in favor of this. Among the many details that I obtained regarding size of families and the whereabouts of their members, there were a few cases of individuals leaving the central group and going to the Caroní or elsewhere in this region to live, but only one of an individual leaving the tribe altogether. On the other hand there are several Arekunas who came from elsewhere (mostly from the Gran Sabana) and joined the tribe — even one Akawai, now dead, did so in recent times. This immigration must at least balance the small emigration.

162 177 Venezuelans (aside from expeditions) have several times visited the tribe and at least two have lived there for considerable periods. One had been with the tribe for about three years at the time of our visit and had married into it. In view of the demonstrated great fertility of the women in native wedlock, it is interesting that neither he nor another Venezuelan, now dead, who married [144] a Kamarakoto woman, are said to have had any children. I have no reason to favor any one of the several possible explanations, but it is important that as far as known the Kamarakotos still do not have any admixture of non-Carib blood, although they do have some from other Carib tribes.

Names

551 177 As shown in the list of household head-men (to'-esa', "amo de la casa") given above, most of the Kamarakotos of the central group have Spanish names.

102 [see footnote on p. 319, category 116 — Analyst]